seventeen and strung out on confusion
Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/26539036.

Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Category:
M/M

Fandom:
Julie and The Phantoms (TV)

Relationships:
Luke Patterson/Alex (Julie and the Phantoms), Alex Mercer/Luke Patterson (Julie and The Phantoms)

Characters:
Luke Patterson, Alex (Julie and The Phantoms), Reggie (Julie and The Phantoms), Bobby | Trevor Wilson, Emily Patterson (Julie and The Phantoms), luke's dad idk his name lol, Alex Mercer (Julie and The Phantoms)

Additional Tags:
Coming Out, Implied/Referenced Underage Drinking, lots of green day, bi luke patterson, Secret Relationship, catholic alex

Language:
English

Series:
Part 1 of coming clean

Stats:
Published: 2020-09-19 Words: 4,217 Chapters: 1/1

seventeen and strung out on confusion

by laszlokreizlers

Summary

He hears the door open, and Alex softly calls out, “Luke?” He buries his head deeper into the pillows, and feels Alex sit next to him and gently squeeze his shoulder. “It’s going to be okay,” he says softly. “We’ll get through this.”

Notes

not edited. totally self-indulgent. i love these ex-boyfriends. title from coming clean by green day.

note added 4/24/2025: do not feed my work to ai. you do not have my permission to use my work in any capacity unless directly asked and approved.

See the end of the work for more notes

It starts quietly, when Luke's in the passenger seat of Alex's car after another fight with his parents, and they just sit. They're parked outside some 24-hour burger joint, and when Luke looks over, Alex looks like he's glowing in the light from the neon sign. His hair falls in his face, and Luke reaches over and gently brushes the hair away, and they don't say anything, not really, but they understand each other, they *know* each other, well enough that when Luke looks in Alex's eyes, he can see a flicker of emotion that he can't quite name. He moves his hand away as quickly as he can, but Alex grabs it, and they just sit, hand in hand, waiting until Luke is calm enough to go home and face another argument.

Alex drives him home. They don't let go of each other, and he gives Luke's hand a tiny squeeze when they pull up in front of his house, wishes him good luck and lets go.

Luke thinks about it the whole night.

He's had that kind of weird feeling before, the butterflies in his stomach and the shaking heart and the urge to tell Alex his every thought. Objectively, he knows its the same feelings he gets when he's around a cute girl. But that's the exact problem. He likes girls.

Alex is gay. That's fine. No one in the band has an issue. But Luke very much *isn't*, and not knowing what the hell is going on is starting to hurt worse than his heart, and all he wants to know is what to call it when you might go both ways. He can't really ask Alex, because he would want to know why, and he doesn't have other friends who would know, and he feels like if something doesn't give, he's going to explode.

Sunset Curve plays their greatest set ever, and even though its a shame it's been wasted at a party in the freaking Valley, of all places,

it's okay, because they're getting beers shoved in their hands and girls in short, short dresses and high, high heels are draping themselves over the backs of chairs and the arms of couches, there only to give the band attention. Someone- Reggie, probably- is whispering in Lukes's ear in a phony Valley accent. "Oh, my God, who knew Valley parties could, like, totally rock?"

Luke looks over, and sure enough, Reggie is grinning like he won a million dollars as a girl pulls him up to dance. Another girl, a redhead, is trying to get Alex up and partying too, and he looks over to Luke, his eyes screaming *Help me* .

Luke laughs slightly, and he gets up and takes the redhead's hand and lets her lead him out to the dance floor. The two and a half beers are settling in, and he's not drunk, he's just warm. His vision is fuzzy around the edges, but he still zeroes in on Alex, sitting on the couch, but now he's talking to a guy with a cropped shirt and short shorts, and jealousy roars in his chest. But he keeps dancing, determined not to let whatever this stupid pseudo-crush is ruin his night.

Reggie's the only one who didn't drink, and Bobby is completely wasted, so they sit up front while Luke and Alex giggle like schoolgirls in the back. Alex grabs Luke's hand, and there's a tiny spark that sizzles up from his fingertips through his whole body when Alex starts to absently play with his fingers.

Bobby goes home first, and it takes a group effort to sneak him in. Luke's house is next, and he's been dreading going inside from the moment they left for the party. Alex slides next to him in the backseat again, and he considers his options- ask if he can stay at someone's house or stay silent and hope that someone picks up that he would rather die than risk getting caught sneaking in.

Alex nudges him and asks if Luke wants to stay over at his place, and he's never felt more grateful. He nods and mumbles yes, and lets Alex start playing with his fingers again as he tells Reggie to go straight to his house.

Alex kisses him on the cheek before they go to sleep, sharing the bed like they have since they were little, and Luke stays awake thinking about it for hours.

There's no fight for three weeks, which is some kind of miracle, and his parents trust him enough that his dad allows him into his study- usually sacred ground and only to be touched when necessary. It's full of knickknacks and huge books and expensive whiskey, but he ignores it and goes straight for the vintage Playboy magazines. He's a 17-year-old boy, what did his parents expect?

He picks through a few, but it's one in the very back that draws his attention, its cover promising an interview with David Bowie- and calling him a "sexual switch-hitter."

Luke's not sure how much he likes that term, but its the closest he's come so far to having a name for his feelings. He skips right past the girls and into the interview, skimming it until he finds familiar words, heterosexual and gay. He reads up, looking for context- and its there. Bold black letters. David Bowie says he's bisexual. That he's into men and women.

He tears up, and he holds the magazine to his chest while he chokes back a sob before he puts the rest of the magazines back on the shelf, slips Bowie under his shirt, and dashes to his room.

He knows why the issue about bisexuality is at the back. He loves his parents, he does, and he knows they're good people. But he also knows that during some gay march in DC, his mother turned off the news, and that his father heard one of his coworkers was gay and never brought him up again.

He knows that no matter how much his parents love him, deep down, they wouldn't accept this part of him.

Alex asks him to sneak off to a Green Day concert in San Francisco- on a Thursday, no less- and Luke thinks he agrees, but conversations with Alex have turned more into him talking and Luke staring at his lips. Alex smiles and says they can head out right after school, and Luke watches him walk away, dazed and excited and worried. Sneaking off to a rock show six hours away isn't something his parents are going to get over, and it going to cause a huge fight if they find out.

But Alex's smile when he had said yes, and the idea of going up to San Francisco with him is too enticing to say no to.

He tells his parents that Alex is tutoring him in math that night, so he's staying over. Alex tells his that he's staying with Luke to work on a project.

They leave at lunch the day of the show, and they scream with excitement the first hour, Alex's beat up car speakers squeaking out *Dookie* and their hearts pounding. It gets boring quickly, and Alex enlists Luke to read out loud. They both have to have *The Great Gatsby* finished by Monday, and the story carries both of them away. He reads until his throat gets hoarse, drinks a whole water bottle, and picks it back up.

They finish before they get to the venue, and they sit for a half hour just talking about everything and nothing. How long the drive was, how Luke hasn't had an issue with his parents in weeks, how bad they need to pee, how Alex is thinking about coming out to his parents.

"I mean, I prayed about it," he says, suddenly, only a few blocks away from the venue. "And I felt like God was okay with it. But my parents might not be. And church… definitely not." He fiddles with the crucifix on his necklace. "I mean, they're Catholics, so they'll hate you and lie to your face about it, but I don't know if that's better or worse than them just being flat out… awful."

Luke hurts for him. He knows how important parental approval is for Alex, and he knows how important church is for him too. It would be hell to see him lose them both. He thinks for a moment, trying to come up with the right words, but draws a blank, and just puts his hand on the center console, palm up, and lets Alex reach over and lace their fingers together.

They sit like that until they get to the venue, and then a little longer, until Alex lets go so he can park and get out. Luke almost wishes he would reach for his hand again, that he'd play with his fingers the way he had in Reggie's backseat, but he knows that he won't. Even in San Francisco, it's terrifying to even think about showing that kind of affection. They don't touch, but they stand close together in the line to get in the show. It's too cold to be spaced apart.

The seats aren't great, but the music is perfect. It's loud and it's bright and it's a perfect storm of messy and neat and angry and lovely. Luke can't really see, but Alex is screaming and smiling and his hair is

flopping in his face, and he looks down at Luke with the biggest grin, and *God*, he wants to kiss him so bad.

But he just brushes the hair out of Alex's face and turns back to the show.

They laugh the whole way back to the car, smiling with excitement and singing, and Alex drapes his arm over Luke's shoulders and opens the door for him, and the butterflies in his stomach and the shaking of his heart threaten to kill him if he doesn't do something right now. But he holds back, and watches Alex shut the passenger door and hop into the driver's seat. But he doesn't start the car. He sits, quiet, and then says suddenly, quietly, "Luke… I had a lot of fun tonight." His hand flys up to the cross charm again. "Thank you for coming with me."

And Luke's words tumble out of his mouth, and without meaning to, the question he's been dying to ask bursts out. "Can I kiss you?" Everything stops- Luke's breathing, Alex's necklace twisting, and he frantically tries to fix it. "I mean- God- We don't- we don't have to if you don't want. I'm so sorry."

"No! No," Alex exclaims, and he takes his hand off his necklace and puts it on Lukes's shoulder, squeezing it lightly. "Luke…" And then he's leaning in, and so softly, so carefully, he kisses him.

The butterflies explode out of his chest.

It's simple, and its sweet, and Luke never wants it to end, but Alex is pulling away, and it's over way too quickly. He moves to lean in again, but Alex quietly says, "Wait."

Luke's heart starts pounding, and he pulls away. "What's up?" he asks, desperately trying to keep his voice even.

"I just…" He sighs, looks straight ahead for a second, and back at Luke. "This isn't just you experimenting, right? Using your gay friend to figure yourself out?"

He can't help but laugh, and Alex quickly moves his hand off Luke's shoulder and looks out his window. "No, Alex…" His chest feels like it's caving in. "Hey. Come on, man, look at me." Alex drags his gaze over, and his shoulders slump. "I'm not- God, I've had a crush on you for. Months." He slips his hand in Alex's. "You were never just an experiment."

They don't move, and then suddenly Alex is sliding his hand through Luke's hair, pulling him in, and kissing him again. And again. And again.

The drive home is quiet. They listen to a random tape Alex finds in the glove box, and they hold hands over the center console, and in the middle of a highway that smells like manure, Alex asks him a question he's been kind of dreading. "So does this mean… you're gay?" He rubs his thumb over the back of Luke's hand, a gesture that's oddly tender and comforting.

"Um…" Luke feels like he's shrinking into himself, and his confession comes out quietly. "I think I'm bisexual. Like David Bowie."

Alex hums, brings their intertwined fingers to his mouth, and kisses Luke's knuckles gently before letting them fall back down. It's quiet for a minute, and then he casually adds, "You know, Billie Joe Armstrong is bisexual."

Luke jolts upright. "He's *what* ?!"

Alex laughs, and Luke feels like he's smiling so big his face is gonna split. "Yeah. He said it in an interview earlier this month." He squeezes Lukes's hand. "He also said that 'Coming Clean' is about coming out."

"Holy crap." He turns the cab light on and digs through the cassettes in the glovebox.

"What are you doing?"

"Listening to 'Coming Clean' on a loop."

They don't tell anyone. They don't talk about telling people, but Alex is only out to the band and Luke isn't out at all. It just makes sense. And it's not like they act differently- they've always had the kind of friendship where they hug and sit close to each other and held hands- it just feels different. And if anyone in the band notices them sneaking off together during school, or after practice, or before a gig, they don't mention it.

It's just nice. It's simple. Nothing between them changes, except for the kissing thing, and it feels like everything is going right for once.

And then, because nothing can go right, it blows up again.

Because everyone's parents got together, and Alex's mom told Luke's mom how nice it was for them to let Alex stay over to work on a project, and Luke's mom says that never happened. It takes about three seconds for them to put together the lie.

That's the night Luke runs out for good. His mother screams that he's ungrateful, and letting him in that band was the biggest mistake she's ever made, and he screams right back that she's never going to understand him. He throws his clothes in a backpack, grabs his guitar, and gets on his bike, going as fast as he can, trying to get away from her sobs. He doesn't look back.

He stays at Alex's that night, climbing through his window and curling up in his bed. Alex isn't in yet, so Luke is stuck, alone, in his secret boyfriend's bed, face down in the pillows as he tries desperately to forget what's going on.

He hears the door open, and Alex softly calls out, "Luke?" He buries his head deeper into the pillows, and feels Alex sit next to him and gently squeeze his shoulder. "It's going to be okay," he says softly. "We'll get through this."

Luke stays with Alex for two nights, and he loves being there. But if he plans on staying away from home, he can't live with his best friend. Its the first place his parents would look.

He lives in the studio. There's a loft that's easy to hide in and has some of his extra clothes, and it's not like he went anywhere else anyways. He goes into the district office and figures out when he can

take the high school proficiency exam, and within two weeks, he's done with high school and spending every waking moment writing, rehearsing, or with Alex.

But it's hard. No one outside of the band knows he's living there, and his diet has turned into junk food and whatever Alex had for dinner the night before. He misses home, but he doesn't miss the fighting. Alex stays over sometimes, and they talk for hours and hours and fall asleep next to each other, and it's like a breath of fresh air every time he wakes up and sees Alex sleeping next to him, his hair lit up gold by the rising sun.

Alex shows up to the studio in the middle of a storm, and he doesn't want to talk about it. He doesn't want to talk about it for three days, which he's spent in Luke's too small muscle tees and Bobby's sweatpants, until Luke manages to coax it out of him at rehearsal.

"I told my parents. I told them that I'm gay." He's slouched over in a chair, staring at the floor, his hands patting a rhythm on his knees. "It didn't go well." His hair falls in his face, and his hands pat faster, and Luke kneels in front of him, brushes the hair out of his face, and pulls him into a hug, holding him there until his hands stop moving and he sobs into Luke's hoodie.

"It's going to be okay," Luke murmurs in his ear, repeating the words Alex had said to him the night he'd run away. "We'll get through this."

Alex goes home the next day, and when he comes back to rehearsal, he seems better. Says that he talked it out with his parents, and they love him no matter what.

But his hand keeps going up to rub his necklace and then falling. Because the crucifix is gone, leaving a plain gold chain.

Luke doesn't know if Alex took it off on purpose or if his parents told him to, and he doesn't want to pry. But he knows its a big deal. Alex lost two of the most important things in his life. Luke's heart breaks for him.

The next few weeks hurt. Alex pulls away and retreats into himself, except for when he drums. Then, he's ferocious and angry, and he breaks three sticks before he starts to finally calm down.

He doesn't explain it, and Luke doesn't try to understand. He knows he never could. He just tries to make him feel better.

He sneaks off to Santa Monica pier with his limited spending money in his pocket, determined to find a replacement for Alex's necklace. Every booth is overpriced, with thick rings and ugly charm bracelets and gaudy jeweled pendants, and the longer he walks, the worse it looks. But at the end, there's a small booth with an old, hippie-looking woman quietly working, and he sees something perfect. A bracelet, just some black cord with a rainbow pattern, and he picks it up carefully. It's small and subtle enough that no one would notice if they weren't looking, but enough for Alex to wear and know that no matter what, he is loved. It's almost out of his budget, but the hippie woman takes one look at Luke, with his grimy jacket and sad eyes, and gives it to him for $10. He thanks her profusely, pockets the bracelet, and runs.

Alex cries when Luke gives him the bracelet and hugs him for a while before putting the bracelet on and saying he's never going to take it off.

Yeah, its definitely been the best few months of his life. The whispered *I love you* 's and the quiet, secret kisses, the way they can read each other's minds.

Things are calm, mostly, and Luke is starting to think about coming out. He's not going to yet. He's just imagining. Wondering what it would be like. Things are going great with Alex, and things are great with the band, and it's not like much would change.

But it's still terrifying. Luke's not sure he wants anyone else to know he's bisexual, and the thought of any backlash from his friends freaks him out. They were fine with Alex being gay. But being bi might be a different ballgame.

Besides, he doesn't want it to change anything with Alex. Yeah, everything is great now, but its also a secret. If people knew, it might ruin what they have.

But really, what is there to ruin?

He's getting a little bitter about not being able to go out in public with his boyfriend, that their dates are dinner 'as friends' and then heated makeouts in the backseat of a car, pulled over on a dark shoulder of the freeway with music that doesn't fit the mood playing in the background.

He just doesn't want things to be weird. Alex is his best friend first, and his boyfriend second, but telling Reggie and Bobby would switch it around.

But maybe that wouldn't be so bad.

The secret is getting exhausting, and that spark he felt before is slowly going out. Every time he looks at Alex, he feels more guilty than happy, and keeping up both a relationship and a friendship is more work than he imagined.

He doesn't want it to end. But it's looking closer and closer to imploding every minute they spend together.

It ends quietly, when Luke's in the passenger seat of Alex's car and holding his hand. The sparks don't run up his arms anymore, and he's trying to figure out how to tell him that he just doesn't feel the way he used to, and Alex beats him to it. "Luke, you know you're my best friend, right?"

His heart falls into his stomach, then lower. "Yeah. And you're mine."

"And I love you."

"I love you too."

"But I don't love you like *that.* " Alex sighs. "And, God, I'm sorry about it. But I just don't anymore."

"No, it's…. It's okay. I get it." Luke lets go of his hand. "Something changed. It's okay."

Alex takes a deep breath. "Okay. Well. I'm glad we're on the same page." He starts to twist his bracelet around his wrist.

"Yeah."

It's silent, and it's not the comfortable silence they usually have. They don't touch, they don't look at each other. Alex drives back to the studio, and Luke gets out without saying goodbye.

They don't hold hands, and Luke doesn't brush the hair out of Alex's face, and something has definitely, permanently shifted with them.

They're still friends. They'll always be friends. But they'll also always be exes, and it's not a feeling Luke thinks he'll get used to.

It appears he won't have to get used to it. Because now he's dead.

And he has so many regrets.

He hasn't seen his mom in six months. He never came home.

He hasn't been the same with Alex for two months. They never talked it out.

He isn't going to live his dream. It was never fully realized.

Alex is crying somewhere in this dark hole they're stuck in, and it feels like he's been crying for hours, and Luke doesn't even know how to comfort him. He can't figure it out. Nothing is the same anymore, and his only option is to leave it alone.

Being a ghost is making things weird again, and he doesn't know why his unresolved feelings are being drudged up, but he hates it. But at least they're acting like normal, the way they used to. Luke can brush the hair out of Alex's eyes, and it's not a thing, and they can hang out in silence, and it's not awkward. They can talk about family again, and its not painful.

But they don't hold hands. That feels reserved for a different feeling.

They do once, out of instinct, when Julie's dad randomly walks in the room. They used to do it when Alex's dad would sneak up on them. Alex presses his hand to Luke's chest, and Luke grabs it, and it lasts a second before they realize what happened.

"Let's not," Alex whispers, letting go and putting his hand in his pocket.

Luke feels his heart break, just a little bit, and he quietly says, "Yeah."

They don't talk about it again.

He misses how they used to be.

Alex starts to hang out with someone new, and it's not that Luke is

jealous. He's been over him long enough to not be jealous.

It's more like he's wistful.

He doesn't want to be with Alex. But when he talks about Willie, it reminds Luke of the way he used to talk about Alex, before they had dated, before he'd even known he had a crush on him, and that memory hurts just a little bit. He tries to push it away, but the feeling still lingers.

He sees the way Alex looks at Willie, and he knows deep down, that its the same way Alex used to look at him.

He needs to get past it.

He doesn't realize it until that night at Caleb's, but maybe he is past it. It feels like he is. When he looks at Willie, he doesn't miss what he had with Alex. When he looks at Alex, he doesn't immediately think of kissing in a car.

Luke swings his arm around Alex's shoulder as he stammers out a lie about not liking Willie. "Alex," he says, looking into his eyes, "I'm happy for you."

And he means it.

A week later, Alex shows up to rehearsal, crucifix back around his neck, and they warm up with "Coming Clean," and it doesn't hurt.

It feels normal.

End Notes

twitter: nickr0b
tumblr: zcnmasters

david bowie's playboy interview: https://www.playboy.com/read/playboy-interview-david-bowie
green day's the advocate interview: https://green-day-quotes.tumblr.com/post/164677346289/billie-joe-armstrongs-full-interview-with-the

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